

Place.
Non-Place.


Taking care of business.

Amy Peace Buzzard

As a place this place has been looked after. The floor is clean; there is no rubbish, only fag ends left behind. Plants are cared for here, carefully groomed, attended to. This is not a maternal care; it's more clinical than that, colder. People pass through this place, everyday footfall repeating. For the people that there is, there is a lack of person.

Part of this work is a look at the care given. However alien this care could make the environment, however cold or clinical, it is still grounded in this sense of attention. The other part is to look at the absence I have found here, the lack of character, or sense of person I have experienced.

In Marc Augé's text *Non-Places* he discusses ideas of supermodernity and the formation of spaces of transience that in some way allow us to remain anonymous. He looks at what makes a space a place, what makes it significant. Here, in this work, I take his words and place them alongside my study of this place, hoping to find an answer to this sense of absence I have found.



“If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of ‘places of memory’, and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position. A world where people are born in the clinic and die in hospital, where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps, shantytowns threatened with demolition or doomed to festering longevity); where a dense network of means of transport which are also inhabited spaces is developing; where the habitué of supermarkets, slot machines and credit cards communicates wordlessly, through gestures, with an abstract, unmediated commerce; a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral...”

51°30'14" N 0°1'12" W





1

Keeping records of life.
Verifying,
This is correct.

I found a hairslide.
Right there, by the beers.
A bit bent, and a bit trodden.
Walked over by distracted shoppers.

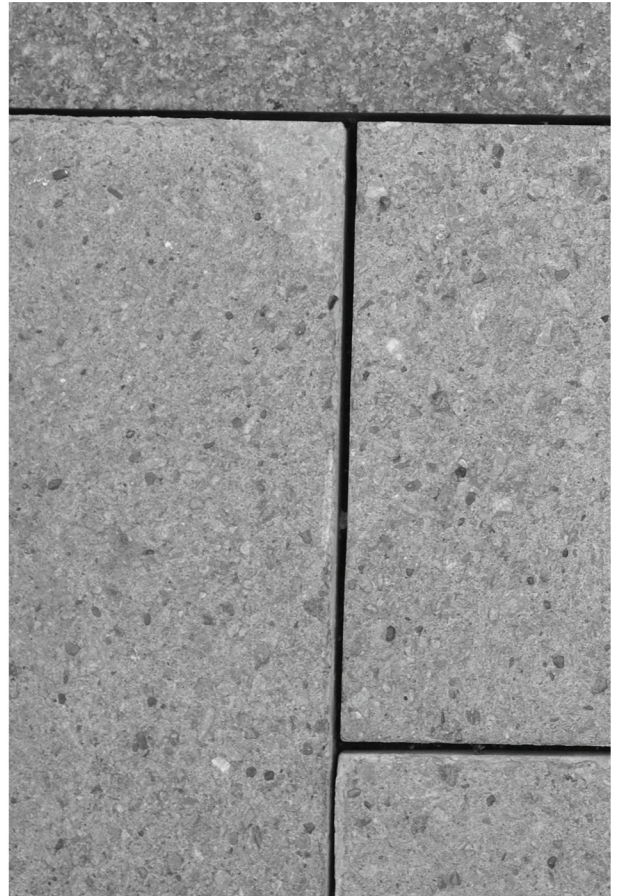
Footprints from someone else.

I found a space,
Left behind by most,
Overlooked by many.
An unnoticed spot,
Right there.

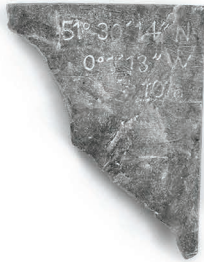
We should add that the same things apply to the non-place as to the place. It never exists in pure form; places reconstitute themselves in it; relations are restored and resumed in it; the 'millennial ruses' of 'the invention of the everyday' and 'the arts of doing', so subtly analysed by Michel de Certeau, can clear a path there and deploy their strategies. Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten. But non-places are the real measure of our time; one that could be quantified - with the aid of a few conversions between area, volume and distance - by totalling all the air, rail and motorway routes, the mobile cabins called 'means of transport' (aircraft, trains and road vehicles), the airports and railway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks, large retail outlets, and finally the complex skin of cable and wireless networks that mobilize extra-terrestrial space for the purposes of a communication so peculiar that it often puts the individual in contact only with another image of himself.

Marc Augé, Non-Places, pg 78-79

51°30'14" N 0°1'13" W



2



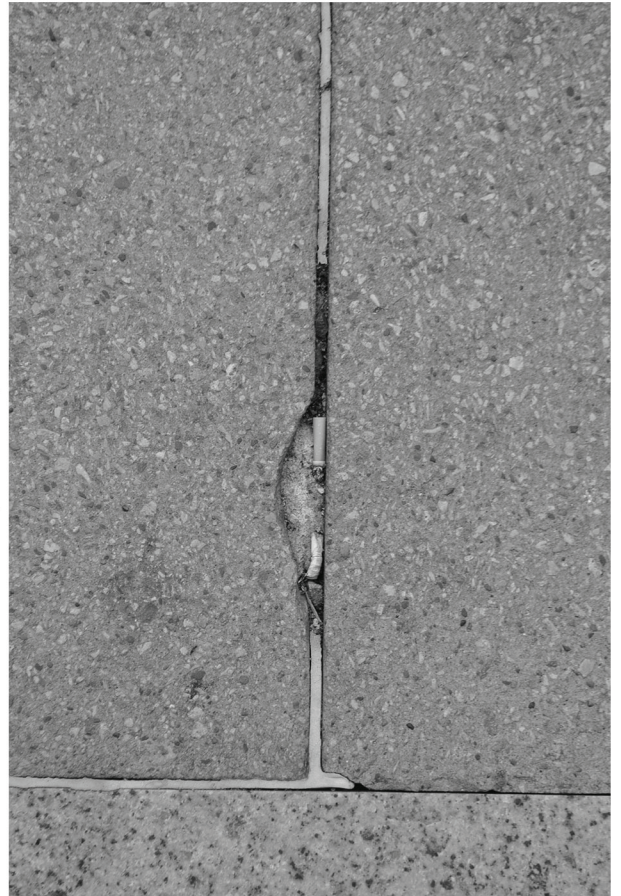
Traces of a somebody, a someone.
A brimming non-place.
Temporarily filling, this influx of
people.
Leaving behind no things,
Leaving behind a workload,
A load of time spent.
But no things.

“The third reference, which stems from the second, – highlights the narrative as an effort that ceaselessly 'transforms places into spaces and spaces into places'. There follows, naturally, a distinction between 'doing' and 'seeing', observable in everyday language which by turns- suggests a picture ('there is . . .') and organizes movements ('you go in, you cross, you turn .. .')...

Lastly, the narrative, and especially the journey narrative, is compatible with the double necessity of 'doing' and 'seeing' ('histories of journeys and actions are punctuated by the mention of the places resulting from them or authorizing them')”

Marc Augé, Non-Places, pg 80-81

51°30'19" N 0°1'20" W





3

Moving around here feels absent.

What is noticed?

By who?

Fragments must be left behind,

But quickly swept away.

Journeys are taken and lost.

“When Michel de Certeau mentions 'non-place', it is to allude to a sort of negative quality of place, an absence of the place from itself, caused by the name it has been given. Proper names, he tells us, impose on the place 'an injunction coming from the other (a history. . .)'. It is certainly true that someone who, in describing a route, states the names appearing along it, does not necessarily know much about the places...

And he adds: 'These names create non-place in the places; they turn them into passages' (p. 156). We could say, conversely, that the act of passing gives a particular status to place names, that the fault line resulting from the law of the other, and causing a loss of focus, is the horizon of every journey (accumulation of places, negation of place), and that the movement that 'shifts lines' and traverses places is, by definition, creative of itineraries: that is, words and non-places.”

Marc Augé, Non-Places, pg 85

51°30'24" N 0°1'22" W



4

Characters are collected,
Rounded up,
Removed from sight.
A building with a name is all.
Not a person.
Buildings are the bodies.
Standing still.



“Clearly the word 'non-place' designates two complementary but distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces. Although the two sets of relations overlap to a large extent, and in any case officially (individuals travel, make purchases, relax), they are still not confused with one another; for non-places mediate a whole mass of relations, with the self and with others, which are only indirectly connected with their purposes. As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality...

But the real non-places of supermodernity - the ones we inhabit when we are driving down the motorway, wandering through the supermarket or sitting in an airport lounge waiting for the next flight to London or Marseille - have the peculiarity that they are defined partly by the words and texts they offer us: their 'instructions for use', which may be prescriptive ('Take right-hand lane'), prohibitive ('No smoking') or informative ('You are now entering the Beaujolais region').”

Marc Augé, Non- Places, pg 94-95

51°30'21" N 0°1'4" W



5

Bodies are kept well,
Dressed up, buffed and polished new.
We drift past.
Their care negating their presence.
When there's absence we see that.
Just that.

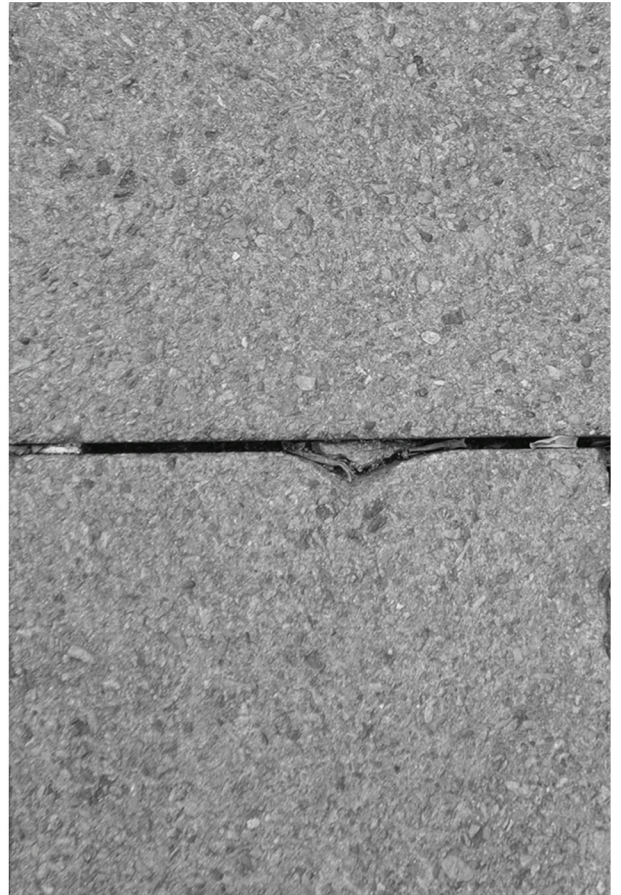


“Anthropological place' is formed by individual identities, through complicities of language, local references, the unformulated rules of living know-how; non-place creates the shared identity of passengers, customers or Sunday drivers. No doubt the relative anonymity that goes with this temporary identity can even be felt as a liberation, by people who, for a time, have only to keep in line, go where they are told, check their appearance...

Alone, but one of many, the user of a non-place is in contractual relations with it (or with the powers that govern it). He is reminded, when necessary, that the contract exists. One element in this is the way the non-place is to be used: the ticket he has bought, the card he will have to show at the tollbooth, even the trolley he trundles round the supermarket, are all more or less clear signs of it. The contract always relates to the individual identity of the contracting party.”

Marc Augé , Non- Places, pg 101

51°30'22" N 0°1'11" W



6

Absence swells, its makers busy,
Busy cleaning up and collecting traces.
Lost and found.
Filling in, with repair.
Taking the space and looking after it.
Looking out for,
Paying attention,
Paying...

Caretaking time,
Looking after,
Taking care of business.

Care and absence is reflected.
Time taken to remove
And we fill.
For the moment.



“What he is confronted with, finally, is an image of himself, but in truth it is a pretty strange image. The only face to be seen, the only voice to be heard, in the silent dialogue he holds with the landscape-text addressed to him along with others, are his own: the face and voice of a solitude made all the more baffling by the fact that it echoes millions of others. The passenger through non-places retrieves his identity only at Customs, at the tollbooth, at the checkout counter. Meanwhile, he obeys the same code as others, receives the same messages, responds to the same entreaties. The space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude.”

Marc Augé , Non- Places, pg 103



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Full text - Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, Marc Augé translated by John Howe.